MONTREAL – In his 35 years as a music teacher and choir director at Montreal’s St. George’s School of Montreal, Vilna-born David Botwinik taught more than 30,000 students. He has also written scores of Yiddish songs, which have been circulated around the world.

Now 90, Botwinik will be honoured on Friday, June 17 (2 p.m.) at the second annual International Yiddish Theatre Festival at the Segal Centre of the Performing Arts. For the first time he will witness a concert featuring his very own music performed by internationally acclaimed soprano Lisa Wilner, pianist Elena Berman and acclaimed soprano Lisa Wilner.

Retired music teacher Botwinik to have Yiddish concert in his honour

Botwinik retired in 1991 after a career at the Jewish People’s and Peretz Schools (JPPS) and United Talmud Torahs. But working closely with Alexander, one of his three sons, who is now a Yiddish teacher at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, he has kept busy writing music and, of course, his book. He does not use a computer, so he writes everything by hand and sends it by mail to Alexander.

“I transcribed his handwritten scores onto the computer using music engraving software and painstakingly added the lyrics under the notes in both Yiddish and transliteration,” Alexander explained. “I also did the book design and layout and worked on translating the song lyrics together with my wife Naomi Cohen and my brother Levy. Since the book came out last summer, I have continued to be involved with publicity, arranging quite a few interviews and concerts devoted to my father’s music.”

David Botwinik came to Canada in 1956 with his wife Silvana, who had been hidden in a church with other Italian Jews during the German occupation of Italy. The couple still live in the same home in suburban Côte Saint-Luc where they raised their daughter and three sons.

Botwinik said he is not finished yet. He plans to start working on a book about the Holocaust, including stories his own family may have not yet heard.

The Jewish Public Library, in partnership with the Montreal International Yiddish Theatre Festival at the Segal Centre for Performing Arts, presents From Holocaust to Life on Friday, June 17 (2 p.m.) at The Studio, Segal Centre for Performing Arts (5170 Cote Ste-Catherine Rd.). General admission is $15. To reserve tickets, call (514) 739-7944. Info: www.jewishpubliclibrary.org or www.botwinikmusic.com.

JAZZ SENSATION NIKKI YANOFSKY HEADLINES

Strong Jewish presence as St. George’s School of Montreal celebrates 80th anniversary

Nikki Yanofsky performs at a benefit for her school, St. George’s.

Nikki Yanofsky performs at a benefit for her school, St. George’s. Before the show as part of a St. George’s TV red carpet interview, “I’m never going to forget being in St. George’s. They have been so supportive of me ever since I started singing. They are the best school ever.” High-profile Hollywood film director Shawn Levy, the man behind such hits as Night at the Museum, The Pink Panther, Date Night and Cheaper By the Dozen, was the evening’s honouree. Officer announced that the school is establishing the Shawn Levy Junior Filmaker Award.

It culminated in a successful gala evening at the L’Astral Theatre, which have been circulated around the world. The concert celebrates Botwinik’s new book, which will be available for purchase, contains its second printing. The couple still live in the same home in suburban Côte Saint-Luc where they raised their daughter and three sons.

Botwinik told the Jewish Tribune. “I know a lot of them may have wondered what happened to me. Well I am doing fine and anxious to show them.” Lou Burko, the retired music director at Shaare Zion Congregation in Montreal, calls Botwinik’s book “a formable opus” and “a musical biography of David Botwinik’s life.”

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Cummings don’t hide their Jewish identities

The Cunninghams, known as the ‘first family of rock’ will perform at the hard Rock Cafe at Yonge and Dundas in Toronto as part of the MONTREAL International Yiddish Film and Music Festival.

As for the name the Cunninghams and its complete lack of a Jewish connection, the group notes “this has turned out to be a marketable name that we use on stage, but none of us hide the fact we are Jewish. Look at the Ramones, the Beastie Boys, Fish and even Bob Dylan. These are all Jewish artists, who did not use their original names.”

The Cunninghams hope to tour the fall. While each of the members hold actual day jobs, they do indeed hope that success might one day turn this into a permanent musical gig. For more about the group log on to their splash page at www.thecunninghams-band.com, where you can follow them on Facebook, Twitter and other social media. A revamped site is under construction.